GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
AGRICULTURE
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:2049
ANSWERED ON:29.07.2002
PLANT QUARANTINE STATION
SUNIL KHAN

Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Comptroller and Auditor General of India (C&AG) has recommendedinvestigation both by customs authorities and Ministry of Agriculture regarding serious lapses detected at plant Quarantine Station at Panitanki in West Bengal resulting risk of import of infected plants/plant materials worth Rs.1.66 crores; and

(b) if so, the reaction of the Government thereto?

Answer

MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI HUKUMDEO NARAYAN YADAV)

(a): The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (C&AG) has forwarded a draft paragraph on the object.

(b): Since July 2000, Customs authorities are referring the consignments and the same are being subjected to quarantine inspections.

The comments have been communicated to Director (Inspection), Office of theDirector of Audit (Central), Kolkata.The copy of the comments is annexed.

Annexure

Draft Paragraph on `Loss of Revenue` relating to Plant Quarantine Station, Kalimpong for inclusion inCAG`s Audit Report, Union Govt. (Civil) for the year ended 31.3.01

Points of irregularities

1. From September 1987 to July 2000 all consignments of imported plant material were allowed intothe country without necessary certification from the PPO. The gross negligence and failure resulted in the risk of import of infected plant material into the country and a revenue loss of Rs.1.66 crore for the period September 1987 to July 2000.

2. Since PPO did not carry out a single such inspection of infected plant material, a large part of theexpenditure incurred during the period September 1987 to July 2000 on his office amounting to Rs.81.59 lakh was infructuous.

Comments

The audit themselves have observed that PPO could not inspect imported consignments ofagricultural products for the period since inspection of the Plant Quarantine Station in September 1987 toJuly 2000 because the customs authorities, (for whom it was obligatory to release these consignments only after inspection and clearance certificate from the PPO did not refer the consignments to Plant Quarantine Station (PPO), Panitanki and released the imported consignments without such inspection.It was also observed by the audit that the Superintendent of Customs, Land Customs Station, Panitankiwrote to the Asstt. Commissioner of Customs, Naxalbari Division only in December 1998 seeking instructions in this regard. Due to non-receipt of instructions, the Superintendent of Customs, Land Customs Station, Panitanki did not refer any consignment of imported plant material to the PPO till July2000. Inspections by the PPO could commence only from August 2000 after these were referred to him (PPO)It is further stated that non-inspection of agricultural comoodities at Plant Quarantine Station,Panitanki during the period under report was neither due to negligence nor failure in anyway on the part of the Plant Protection Officer at Plant Quarantine Station, Panitanki as the Plant Quarantine Officerneither had any access nor any authority to inspect such consignments unless refered to them by Customs Department through an official endorsement on the body of the bill of entry/import documents. No importers or their customs agents approached the Plan Protection Officer, Panitanki with the bills ofentry during the period under reference. It is further mentioned that Customs Officers at L.C.S., Panitankidid not refer any such consignments in spite of several instructions by their Senior Officers from time to time.

Opening of Plant Quarantine Station at Panitanki was an essential step towards implementationof legal/.statutory requirements under DIP Act 1914 and provisions of PFS Order, 1989.Non-inspection of materials during the period under report was beyond the control of Plant Protection Officer (PPO) as the competent custom authorities did not refer the plant materials to the PQ Station, Panitanki, for inspection/release. However, since the inception of the Plant Quarantine Station, Panitanki in September1987, the issuance of

PSCs, which is not linked with the Customs Authorities, has been continuing there as a major Plant Quarantine activity.

Points of irregularities

3. The Customs authorities were also at fault in releasing the consignments without inspection and certifications from the PPO.

4. The case calls for investigation both by the Customs authorities and Ministry of Agriculture forsuch serious lapses, which, besides causing financial losses, also exposed the country to the risk of getting infected plant material into the country.

Comments

The Plant Protection Officer or other Plant Quarantine officials at Panitanki were not a faultAs Customs authorities did not refer the consignments and released them without being inspected from Plant Quarantine angle, they are responsible for the lapse on their part, though it was legal binding responsibility on them to refer the plant/plant materials to Plant Quarantine Station, Panitanki.Further, it is stated that all possible steps were taken by Plant Quarantine Officials from time to time and theCustoms authorities were approached to get the consignments referred for PQ inspection.

In view of the foregoing facts and also in the light of efforts made by PPO, Panitanki to get theconsignments referred for Plant Quarantine inspection, it is requested that audit paragraphs may kindly be dropped from the Audit Report with reference to Ministry of Agriculture, Department of Agriculture and Cooperation, Directorate of Plant Protection, Quarantine and Storage and Plant Quarantine Station, Panitanki.